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ABSTRACT

As students grow and develop, schools should be able to respond and provide an appropriate education for them. Six continua are involved in the educational development of a student: organization of knowledge, source of curriculum ideas, purpose of curriculum, learning processes, role of the teacher, and role of the student. These continua can provide a framework for schools to assess how they assist in student development from elementary to secondary education. That most young people grow and develop with minor difficulties does not mean that the common continuum of learning is the best. Continuity and coherence in curriculum are important elements in assessing the educational continuum. Continuity curriculum criteria include relating students' previous learning and development, showing progression in age and development, making curriculum coherent, and structuring curriculum around the student and course. Transitional programs can help students deal with the change from elementary to secondary education. These programs can provide information and support to parents and students, cooperation between teachers, and curriculum linking. District partnerships between elementary and secondary schools can improve transitions for students. National curriculum can also aid in establishing continuity in education. (Contains 22 references.) (JPT)

THE P-12 EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS

IN WHAT WAYS CAN IT BE A QUALITY EXPERIENCE?

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THE P-12 EXPERIENCE

1. THE NATURE OF THE P-12 EXPERIENCE - CONTINUITY & COHERENCE

Individuals grow and change as they learn. As their learning develops in relation to these changes so schools should respond to these in order to support and enhance learning in appropriate ways. As each person develops continuously so the school's response should, at least in theory, be on a continuum responding to each individual's development.

In working with my graduate students on what is involved with the P-12 experience, a series of continuums were identified, as we analysed the concepts used by primary and secondary teachers and developed a view, based on the continuums, of how curriculum and schooling could develop across the P-12 experience - see Table 1. The continuums indicate a starting point in the child's schooling and an end point given the concerns of secondary schooling and employment. These continuums, I would argue, can provide a framework which schools could use to judge the extent to which their program develops from prep. or reception through to year 12.

Table 1
CONTINUUMS INVOLVED IN CURRICULUM P-12

PREP----->A SERIES OF CONTINUUMS------->12

ORGANISATION OF KNOWLEDGE
Integration ----------> Specialisation
Skills emphasis ----------> Disciplines Based
Child-centred ----------->Further education/work oriented

SOURCE OF CURRICULUM IDEAS
Community ----------> Workplace/Further Ed.

PURPOSE OF CURRICULUM
Develop Basic Skills ----------->Work Needs/Credentials

LEARNING PROCESSES
Concrete and Personal ----------->Formal and Abstract

ROLE OF THE TEACHER
Socialization ----------> Qualification/Selection

ROLE OF THE STUDENT
Dependent----------->Independent
Accepting ----------> Challenging/Rejecting

Does schooling assist this development? Very often the answer must be that it doesn't. Many of the problems related to this failure in schooling are related to the break between the end of Primary and the beginning of Secondary schooling. For example in the ROLE OF THE STUDENT continuum young persons in primary schools often develop to a level of independence in the school by year 6, for example in leadership, in being able to select ways of working, and in undertaking self-directed activities, that is often denied by early years in secondary school when young persons are often returned to a very dependent situation. This is a situation where the development that has occurred is reversed. In the ORGANISATION OF KNOWLEDGE continuum, on the other hand, there is often a gap between primary and secondary schooling. The integration of subjects even at year 6 can clash with the 10 or even 12 separate subjects at year 7. The student is expected to make a significant jump in understanding the way the knowledge is organised and presented.

In both examples the lack of a continuum between the schooling misses the need to support the growth and development of the young person. The fact that most young people seem to cope, with only minor apparent disruption, should not allow us to avoid questioning whether this is the best way for young people to experience learning. The potential for improvement may be significant. We must also recognise that breaks in learning continuums can also occur within schools as well as between schools. Whether any curriculum is supporting a P-12 development is a challenge for all teachers.

But what is meant by Curriculum P-12? One of my students in this area provided this definition as a way of defining the issue: "It is the conscious, deliberate attempt to provide a continuity and coherence within the learning program so that each individual student is being dealt with in a way that values and builds on previous learning experiences throughout the course of her/his schooling" (Barry Wood in 1982).

This definition identifies two related concepts - CONTINUITY and COHERENCE and sees them as applying in the P-12 context to individuals. Continuity can be seen as focussing on sequences of curriculum across time which assist in the effectiveness of each student's ongoing learning. Coherence can be seen as referring to the relationships between various aspects of a student's learning at any one point in time. In that sense Continuity is vertical and Coherence is horizontal. The question is how can these concepts be used to relate the curriculum to each individual student.

One of the problems in this situation, however, is the need for schools to work with many children at the same time thus making difficult the notion of supporting each individual's development. There is a tension between the notion of serving each individual student and managing the formal schooling of what is rarely less than 25 students in any one class. But our systems operate to make this tension even more pointed. The way schooling often operates with a huge chasm between the practices and cultures of primary and secondary schools make it impossible for these schools to have even the pretence of trying to match students' development (Eyers, 1992b, p. 8). The notion that in the six or so weeks between the end of primary school and the start of secondary school all students change considerably in the same way in all these continuums is clearly nonsense. The fact that this change occurs at the end of year 6 in some states and year 7 in others only serves to support Eyers' questioning of those who "tend to believe that this is the way things were meant to be" (Eyers, 1992b, p. 9). The now obsolete reasons for the separation between primary and secondary schooling only makes more difficult meeting the educational needs of each individual child.

Students, however, are individuals and, if schools are to support their learning, the teachers need to find ways of working with each individual as they grow and develop across the thirteen years of schooling, the normal schooling experience for the vast majority of young people. In general the person at 16 years of age is very different in many ways from the person of five years. Just as clearly, however, two person aged 12 can also be very different. The Continuums table (Table 1) is intended to suggest ways in which the differences do develop, not as a series of large steps but along a series of continuums which operate independently for each person. As such the table could be further developed to identify the detailed stages which are involved in the movement along each continuum and which could then be used by schools in the development of their program, curriculum, pastoral and co-curriculum.

Schools do need to respond to the changes that occur but in ways that are congruent with their students. However, the nature of these changes and their effect on the development of curriculum has generated much heat and little light. The present fashion of distrusting discussion about child development has led, in my view, to a failure of curriculum to even attempt to understand how children do change in their learning and conceptual behaviour over the P-12 process.

This distrust has led to some curriculum projects appearing not to take these developments seriously and almost ignore the notions of change which do occur. The Victorian Curriculum Frameworks project, ostensibly a P-12 development, fails to examine thoroughly how this growth and development could occur. There are attempts to describe how young people's learning changes from the time they enter schooling through to the time they finish year 10, (e.g, *English Language Framework P-10* (1988), pp. 90-100 and the *Commerce Framework P-10* (1988), p. 7), but the few attempts are often buried in appendices or are not clearly utilised in the detailed suggestions for developing programs. In either way the developments that are identified are not central to the way the *Framework* helps teachers develop curriculum in relation to children's learning in the area of knowledge involved. In other *Frameworks* one could get the impression that the only difference between children's learning at various ages is one of amount and that the amount is set by the demands of the subject, not the learning needs of each student. Some cynics have argued from their analysis that the *Curriculum Frameworks* project is not P-10, but 10-P, that the each area of knowledge in the project starts from the end point (the expected outcomes of knowledge, skills and values) and organises the curriculum backwards with little regard to the ways each student may develop. The National Curriculum statements, still largely unseen, could fall into the same trap. A P-12 perspective, while not denying the need to identify endpoints, would see the sequence as needing to work more closely with the nature and learning of each student as he/she develops across P-12.

So I am arguing that a school system that caters for all young people from Prep to Year 12 should consider how it manages the learning across the range of P-12, what continuums and developments within these need to be considered and how these relate to the sequencing within subjects and to the particular students that are involved. The aim is learning continuity which implies the need for a curriculum continuity. What sort of practices need to be established for effective curriculum continuity across the different stages in schooling?

2. WHAT THEN IS MEANT BY CURRICULUM CONTINUITY?

What could curriculum continuity look like if it was achieved? Over a period of a number of years during the 1980's and the start of the 1990's my graduate students and I collected and developed criteria for evaluating whether a school or set of schools is operating with a P-12 perspective. In order to examine the question above this collection was searched to find statements of criteria directly

relevant to curriculum continuity and the criteria listed in Table 2 were identified.

Table 2
CRITERIA RELATING TO CURRICULUM CONTINUITY FROM P-12 CURRICULUM COLLECTION

CURRICULUM SHOULD BE RELATED TO STUDENTS' PREVIOUS LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT
The program is designed to build at every level on each student's previous learning experiences and achievements (knowledge and skills acquired).
The curriculum plans and statements reflect what we know about students' development and how they learn, involving clear ideas about progression and sequence.
There is a degree of specialisation/classroom structure appropriate to the child's development.
The curriculum enables students to influence what is learnt by expression of their interests and concerns in deciding on future planning and development
CURRICULUM SHOULD SHOW PROGRESSION IN TERMS OF AGE, LEARNING, ETC.
The Curriculum plans and statements involve clear ideas about progression containing clear scope and sequence to build on and develop previous knowledge and skills; the sequence should not be rigid but be flexible and responsive to student needs.
The Curriculum indicates expected outcomes showing development and progress as far as possible on a P-12 basis.
THE CURRICULUM EXISTS AS A CONTINUITY WITH COHERENCE
There is a structured written curriculum/syllabus for all areas that is published.
The curriculum is a continuous learning program P-12 showing development and progress with no marked divisions at any point. The program is shows knowledge, skills, expected outcomes with a clear scope and sequence involving appropriate options and choices.
The curriculum has links between components/subjects at all levels so articulation occurs.
STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES - THE CURRICULUM IS :
1. STUDENT CENTRED
The curriculum enables students to influence what is learnt by expression of their interests and concerns in deciding on future planning and development
There should be commonalities but with planned detailed progression in expectations of students - learning outcomes, assessment and reporting, discipline, welfare.
There is a developing set of common learning principles underlying teaching methods, learning styles and processes that manifest themselves in the ways rooms and other physical features are arranged for learning.
There is an appropriate emphasis on practice and theory and on concrete and abstract notions developing through all levels.
Developments in curriculum structure exist and when they take place there is an appropriately developed new balance between children's grouping and subject groupings throughout the school.
All curriculum choices allow for ongoing involvement in study; no terminal courses exist.
2. COURSE CENTRED
There is a conscious effort to revisit concepts at a progressively more advanced level.
There is integration of courses vertically within subjects/areas of knowledge and horizontally between subjects/areas of knowledge.
The curriculum is constructed on a "building blocks" principle based on, for example, prerequisites in knowledge and skills.
The curriculum is explicit, clear and shows planning and the links between and within levels so that subjects can build on to and off other studies.
Planning ensures that there is no duplication of material, cf. reinforcement of learning.
There is a checklist of skills, knowledge, values etc. that can be used for monitoring successful completion of student learning.
There is a whole school approach to learning activities (e.g. projects, skill development)

These statements of possible ways of clarifying what is meant by curriculum continuity identify the tension implicit in the question about the nature of curriculum continuity. On one hand we have the need for a program that is continuous and on-going. On the other hand there is the need for programs to build on students' previous learning and development. In theory, of course, there should not be a tension between curriculum development and children's needs but the rocky ground of linking curriculum to children's development shows clearly the difficulties involved when we try to link our programs to where each individual child is in her/his learning. Furthermore, most students attend at least two schools and this further compounds the problems of creating curriculum continuity. So, the need for curriculum continuity seems obvious - is it practically possible?

Hargreaves (1992) argues that even within primary schools "cooperation and liaison on a regular basis *across* grades and divisions is a comparative rarity...; grade-based insulation means that while commendable attention is given to *lateral* curriculum coherence within grades and divisions, *vertical* continuity in the curriculum from one division - or sometimes even one grade - to the next is disconcertingly weak" (p. 225). It would seem reasonable to suggest that the obverse applies in the secondary situation, namely that vertical continuity within a subject area is relatively strong, while lateral coherence between subjects is basically weak. It is important to note that Hargreaves' use of the word "continuity" emphasises its curriculum base, identifying its importance in the learning and teaching program. This is different from the way the word is sometimes used by others where administrative continuity appears to be the main focus.

This problem about the meaning of the word "continuity" occurs in the study detailed in the publication *Curriculum Continuity at 11-plus*, (HMI, 1989a). The study draws attention to the differences between transfer and continuity but there are several times in the account where these differences are blurred. At one place curriculum continuity is identified as having to do with primary - secondary transfer arrangements (e.g. distributing prospectuses, parents and students visiting the secondary school. (ibid.,p.4)). Elsewhere the study identified that groups were set up to consider continuity and although they were "invariably characterised by goodwill they were often ephemeral in nature and some left little to show for their efforts" (ibid., p.8). Although the study is unable to point to long-term, on-going programs of curriculum continuity, it

identified several key factors. "In these localities that are served by only one secondary school the arrangements for liaison and curriculum continuity are usually more straightforward" (ibid., p.16). It continued by identifying nine matters that the authors felt helped with the establishment and maintenance of good curriculum continuity and progression in the children's learnings. These matters were:

"i) a program of regular meetings to review and plan;
ii) curriculum guidelines which spanned both the primary and the secondary phase;
iii) procedures for assessing attainment at transfer;
iv) teaching materials which assist the pupils to assimilate the curriculum of the secondary school;
v) teaching styles and learning experience;
vi) the use of the specialist skills, expertise and interests of both primary and secondary teachers;
vii) the joint use of facilities and resources;
viii) the continuation in the secondary school of a theme or project begun in the primary school;
ix) visits by teachers to each others' schools and classrooms, and joint participation in the teaching." (ibid., p.17).

These themes are also identified by the HMI in another discussion (1989b). They suggest here that the continuity of learning between primary and secondary stages can be facilitated by:

1. "both primary and secondary schools have(ing) an appreciation of what each other is aiming to achieve both in general terms and in specific areas of the curriculum."
2. "effective systems of records (that) help to remove that ignorance of previous work done which often leads to low expectations, needless repetition and misunderstanding...."
3. "secondary schools...try(ing) to adopt the exploratory styles of learning which are characteristic of good primary school practices. Children who have learnt to find information for themselves, to make judgements about the direction their work should take and to pursue an interesting line of enquiry as it presents itself, lose an important element of enjoyment and pleasure in their education if such opportunities are suddenly denied them" (ibid., p.50).

So curriculum continuity would seem to involve articulation of courses across levels or sequences of learning, but done in such a way that it effectively helps each student learn in ways that are appropriate to them individually. The literature also suggests that there are a number of practices which could be seen as providing ways of achieving this continuity. It is important to note, however, that most of these suggestions indicate ways of starting a process. They don't reveal a clear view of what the establishment of continuity might look like.

3. WHAT PROGRAMS TRY TO ACHIEVE THIS?

3.1 Transition Programs

As I have already suggested, one of the serious and apparently intractable problems in this situation is the way the arrangement of schooling virtually everywhere is split between a primary or elementary system and a secondary system. This is further exacerbated by the way the profession is split through different courses in teacher education, differences in the nature of teachers' work and employment and in the cultures which these differences create (see the two endpoints in each continuum in Table 1 and Hargreaves (1986)).

The problem that exists is recognised by the way schools have reacted to the situation. If there was no problem in the break between one school and another there would be no need for school systems or small groups of schools to develop Transition Programs to help students make the change from one level in the school system to another. The arguments above imply that if the system of schools designed to serve students from the beginning to the end of schooling has got its curriculum sequencing and coordination right then there should be no need for a special Transition Program. Such an implication would no doubt be seen as idealistic nonsense by many.

Transition programs normally exist when students are moving between one type of school and another, e.g. primary and secondary, and are normally designed to enable the move or transition to be effective. In a survey of articles describing transition programs my graduate students and I identified three possible purposes of such programs:

1. Information and support to parents and students (e.g. Knox Sherbrooke Transition Group, (n.d.));

2. Cooperative activity between teachers that is intended to lead to curriculum continuity (e.g. .Deer Park/Albanvale Network (1989));

3. Actual Curriculum linking, developing programs involving continuity of program development and learning.

The arguments in the first part of this paper suggest that at least the first of these purposes is a superficial view of the type of activity that is necessary to create a curriculum that develops across the different stages that the schooling structures have created. While information is valuable it does not necessarily make the progress of the student any easier if there is much discontinuity.

Our analysis also led us to make the following judgements about the transition programs that were reviewed:

1. that the secondary culture often predominated and this was reflected in the language used about transition, e.g. "primary schools are feeder schools", and in the importance of subject information compared with other school information.

2. Purpose no. 1 was very often the only purpose attempted; purpose no. 3 was only rarely seen as important.

The Manual of the Knox Sherbrooke Transition Group (n.d.) indicates these sorts of problems. Although the manual emphasises that "P-12 schooling should be seen as a continuum" (p. 9) the focus is clearly on helping students involved in transition to feel comfortable and be cared for and on providing the next level of schooling with information on each student. All of these are important outcomes for transition programs but, if learning continuity is not guaranteed as an essential element, then transition programs may have an impossible task.

A Transition Program is intended to enable movement to occur successfully between the end point of one stage and the beginning of another. If this role of transition programs is taken without any consideration of the meaning and reality of "end point" and "beginning point" then such programs may fall short of the child's real educational needs. If each stage has not considered how its programs and practices enable growth, development and learning to occur and how they will link with the other stage, then the transition program becomes not an integral part of a carefully thought through process of curriculum continuity but a band-aid, trying to cover unnecessary gaps and often doing it

quite inadequately. The fault in such cases, however, lies not with the transition program, but with the stages. Schools cannot solve these problems by handing them over to Transition coordinators and assuming that they will do the job. The task is one which is at the centre of the whole school's curriculum thinking.

Another implication in the above arguments is that there is the need for such communication and liaison between teachers at different levels to be much more than superficial if the ultimate aim of curriculum continuity is to be achieved. As a study in the U.K. stated, "Liaison between schools and curriculum continuity between schools are not one and the same thing" (Benyon, 1984, p. 7). Benyon suggests that liaison is necessary but not sufficient - "good practices in liaison necessarily come before successful attempts at curriculum continuity" - and emphasises that "liaison is easier to get to grips with"; but it is not sufficient if "real curriculum continuity" is to be established (ibid, p.7). As it appears that most transition programs exist at the information giving level with secondary attitudes predominating, then such programs fail to even come close to the enabling curriculum continuity to occur.

3.2. Partnerships of schools serving a community - District Partnerships.

In several recent case studies in England a set of possibly more effective approaches developing curriculum continuity have been explored. Firstly, in two major case studies, there has been an attempt to use different language to avoid what is seen as demeaning concepts between the different stages. In case study 1 a comprehensive school (secondary) and eight primary schools serve an inner city area. In case study 2 a comprehensive school (secondary) and nine primary schools serve a town and its surrounding country. The primary and secondary schools are seen as 'associates', in one case, or 'partners' of each other, establishing an equality of status. The language used avoids the concepts of feeding and swallowing involved in the 'feeder school' language common in much of the practice and literature involving transition (Continuity, n.d.)

Secondly, the schools emphasised the role of curriculum continuity as central to their concerns. In case study 1 the schools attempt to "work closely together, placing continuity and liaison amongst their highest priorities" (ibid., p.5). The Association (as the 9 schools in case study 1 have called themselves) has working parties in English, Maths, Science, Humanities and Physical Education that are charged with three "strategies for continuity":

- "work shadowing and co-teaching" - these terms are not explained but would seem to imply teachers working together, watching each other teach and swapping teaching tasks;
- "producing 'cross-phase profiles' for the various subjects, together with a personal 'cross-phase profile'" for each student - this would seem to be similar to the task being attempted in the various National Statements and Profiles in Australia;
- "planning, each year, a 'bridging project', that is a cross-curriculum topic begun in the primary school and continued in the early weeks of the secondary school". (ibid., p.5).

The Association is very conscious of the heavy workload involved and have developed a "system of mutual supply cover between the schools" (ibid., p.5) to reduce this. "Mutual supply cover" refers to emergency teachers being used to cover regular teachers' absences from classes; in this situation the system seems to involve using the staffing resources of the whole Association flexibly to handle the extra demands placed on staff.

In case study 2 the Partnership of schools based much of its continuity work in a 'Primary-Secondary Classroom' and organise a number of joint inservice days between the schools (ibid., p. 7). The concept of the primary-secondary classroom arose from the identification that while the secondary school organised its year 7 & 8 classes "mainly along traditional primary patterns...., it did not always reflect the 'best' of primary practice.... (nor) offer a number of children the opportunity of specialist teaching" (ibid., p. 7). The result of the development has been a classroom located at the secondary school, but "jointly 'owned' and used by all the schools. The process of establishing the classroom involved a valuable dialogue between teachers at the various levels and parents especially on the "whole question of teaching and learning styles" (ibid., p. 7). Apart from the benefits to the children spending sessions for a day or two at the secondary school the spin-off in understanding between teachers has been important in developing continuity between the 'phases'. The combined inservice days contributed to this growing understanding of continuity issues.

In a further case study the partnership group decided, among other activities, to "appoint a Teacher-Adviser to enhance the management of the learning process 5-16" (ibid., p.8). Despite the promise of these case studies, however, the suggestions to schools contained in this publication on "how to get started" were disappointing in that they contained excellent activities for information

sharing, but not necessarily continuity, although 'continuity' was the word used.

The literature from another partnership of six schools refers to "a formal structure for the individual groups of teachers interested in curriculum continuity across the two phases within the 5-16 age range. Within their own subject/interest areas teachers have sought ways of improving continuity and ease of transfer between primary and secondary school (sic). Since nearly all the Partnership schools are physically near each other cooperation is much easier than in some other areas..... The main areas of growth arise from the spirit of co-operation and willingness to share experience and expertise across the two phases of compulsory education. Teachers have come together to discover that they have more in common than they might have thought in terms of approach. This has led the curriculum groups to push forward many cooperative ideas and schemes, some of which have already been adopted and some of which have attracted funding from elsewhere." Curriculum groups have been established in R.E., History, Maths., Technology, Language and Special Needs. While many problems exist, especially relating to time and resourcing, the documents are optimistic that they value of such cooperation will be delivered in more effective curriculum programs (Kidlington Partnership, 1992, pp. 3-4).

Roy Blatchford, one of the major proponents in these developments in England wrote that "my vision of district partnerships in towns, villages and cities throughout the country has as its base a locally determined Continuity Charter for children and parents: continuity in learning progression and family involvement in a child's education. Each partnership would be tied in closely with a teacher-training institution and the mutual benefits of professional development that would afford teachers" (Blatchford, 1990, p. 3).

The compelling feature for me of these studies was the potential they have for developing continuity on some system basis but doing it in such a way that each individual student could be catered for because the system is still at a small scale. The district appears to have the potential to enable the tension between the set curriculum and the individual student to be handled sensitively.

There have been similar attempts made in Australia both at the level of identifying the possibility and in practical terms. Where a P-12 perspective has

been developed, e.g. in a P-12 school or a district with a strong P-12 commitment, a structure exists that could enable this to happen. The notion of districts, common in the U.S.A. and toyed with in Victoria that could enable a partnership between the schools of a district so that together they have responsibility for the formal education of each student across the whole range, has been suggested as a potentially powerful idea in developing a P-12 approach to the curriculum (Stringer and van Halen (1989)). As the HMI (1989a) study indicated, the partnership between schools is more easily achieved when there are a small number of schools involved. A colleague and I also identified this issue in our discussion of the Victorian policy of district provision (Stringer, 1991a, p.17). This discussion developed from our evaluation of the implementation of district provision (Stringer and Johnson (1990)) that identified that "district boundaries of each region need to be kept under review so that the most effective school arrangements for students are developed" (p. ii). The notion of "effective" within our study clearly involved practicable arrangements for communication implying strongly a relatively small group of cooperating schools.

The report from the Deer Park/Albanvale cluster suggests some further possibilities in this context. This cluster in Victoria consists of four primary schools and two secondary schools. Its report reveals the possibilities and problems of such cooperation when six schools are involved (Deer Park/Albanvale, 1989). It points to a number of successes - development of shared units of work, identification of links between teaching and learning activities and recommendations for action that will support increased cooperation between and knowledge of the programs at different levels of schooling. One can envisage that a possible outcome from this is more effective curriculum continuity, but, as the previous material demonstrates, continuity, if it occurs, is likely to be a long-term result of a cooperative process and is thus more problematic. At the very least, the sharing of units, the discussion between staff and the visits to different schools should create an understanding that enables staff to develop programs more likely to fit the students as they come from different schools. Once again, however, the problems of time and the differences between the two cultures of schooling involved has caused problems.

The development of self-managing schools raises a question in this situation. Self-managing schools could take the opportunity to enter such an association

or partnership in which the group could take advantage of the opportunity to share resources and develop benefits from collaborating on facilities, equipment and staff. On the other hand, much of the rhetoric on devolution sees the school as an individual entity taking little or no regard with what other schools are doing. For example, the Preliminary Paper announcing the "Schools of the Future" program in Victoria talks about each school as if its students were completely independent of any other school. Only in a small section on Remote Schools is the possibility of clustering recognised and then only for administrative and technological reasons (Schools of the Future, 1993). The effect of the self-management concept on the ability and willingness of schools to cooperate for the development of curriculum continuity will be an important question to examine as self-management is more fully implemented in both U.K. and Australia.

3.3 National Curriculum

From another perspective centrally prescribed curriculum promises to provide just the sort of continuity that is being argued for. One of the H.M.I. studies discussed above concluded by pointing out that the National Curriculum should assist the development of curriculum continuity. "The introduction of a coherent framework of attainment targets, programmes of study and periodic assessment throughout the years of compulsory schooling should promote continuity of learning within and between schools" (H.M.I., 1989a, p.20).

What it did not point out is that while National Curriculum guidelines could do this, it could also, by inflexible application of attainment targets and periodic assessment, destroy effective continuity for students whose attainment is different from what is regarded as "average" (Stringer, 1991b). The problems involved with how a National Curriculum continuity is related to any one particular student's curriculum continuity is normally overlooked in these discussions. It seems to be normally assumed that the student should fit what is offered.

The way centrally prescribed curriculum are implemented, particularly with regard to assessment programs, is crucial to effective curriculum implementation for the benefit of students. Clearly there are potentially valuable ways by which curriculum continuity could be achieved by developments in National Curriculum. Just as clearly, and the experience in

U.K. shows this (Stringer, 1991b), insensitive implementation could be absolutely disastrous for individual students.

3.4 P-12 schools and middle schooling

Early in 1992 another colleague and I were approached by a P-12 school to evaluate an aspect of its program, namely what the school called its Transition Unit (Owen et al., submitted). Within Victoria the notion of P-12 schools developed in response to a number of the issues that are discussed in this paper. Each of these P-12 schools have developed structures that are designed to assist the students to move effectively through the P-12 process. One of the structures in this particular school is a unit covering years 6 to 8 with the intention of bridging the primary and secondary sections of the school. The unit has a particular location in the school, a core group of staff and responsibility for the program of the students in the unit. Its staff come from both primary and secondary backgrounds.

It was identified in this bridging situation that the school and unit would need to help children move from the ways of learning to which primary students are used to the ways of learning that they will encounter in the later years of secondary. Thus the staff of the Transition Unit needed to enable its curriculum (ways of learning, teaching styles, content/concepts, organisational structures) to develop both to fit its role as a bridge and to effectively support the developmental changes in their students. Although students in year 8 could be seen as needing quite different curriculum experiences from those in year 6, the continuum between them should be quite clear. The school noted here the danger of seeing the Transition Unit only in bridge terms as I've identified earlier. The two end points before and after a bridge need to accept responsibility for these matters as well.

We decided to conduct the evaluation in this situation by utilising the collection of criteria that has been referred to previously. We searched the list of criteria and identified a number of statements as potentially valuable in evaluating the practice of Transition Units We renamed and recategorized these to make them in our judgement more appropriate to the particular context of the school.

This draft set of criteria was submitted to the school who were to choose between 6-10 of the criteria that they felt specifically met their concerns. Their

choices were negotiated into statements about the operation of their Transition Unit (TU), trialled with a member of their staff and a final list agreed upon. The final list was:

Table 3
STATEMENTS OF CRITERIA AGREED BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE INVESTIGATORS

1. Teachers in a TU should be committed to a system of pastoral care and guidance for every student in the Program. 2. Teachers classroom practices in TU should link subject-centred learning with the needs and interests of the students. 3. The maintenance and use of student records (e.g. medical records, home & language situation) should be an integral part of the conduct of a TU. 4. The TU Teachers should be aware of and build on the curriculum of the preceding years and link the teaching and learning in TU with the post TU curriculum. 5. TU classroom activities should be based on a knowledge of how students learn during their TU years. 6. TU teachers need to share a common understanding of criteria for assessing student progress. 7. An effective TU rests on cooperative interaction between staff who come out of primary and post-primary training and experience. This means that all TU staff should be involved in TU tasks and operations.

On the basis of the trialling an eighth general question was added which was not a criterion but enabled those who were interviewed to add to their responses.

8. Finally, is there anything else that you would like to tell me about the effectiveness of TU and its impact on the students in the College.

A number of representative staff selected by the school were interviewed about the importance of these statements and the extent to which each was actually implemented in the TU. Finally we asked the teachers which of these statements needed most attention in order to improve the TU. The results were very clear - item 7 (Staff Cooperation) was clearly identified by 75% of those interviewed as the first most important as requiring attention and item 4 (Linking curriculum) the second most important by over 60% of those interviewed. Of the other five items, item 5 (How students learn) emerged as the next most important but not nearly as significantly as the other two. All of the seven statements were confirmed by the staff as being highly important in the running of the Transition Unit program. The responses of the staff thus supported the views of the school group who had commissioned the evaluation and provided clear agreement in the school about the purposes and operation of the program. This result encouraged the school to press ahead

with seeing the TU as providing the school with the centre of its education program.

The implementation of the recommendations of the evaluation is showing the potential of such cooperative arrangements while pointing to the difficulty of achieving curriculum continuity. Firstly, the priority of Staff Cooperation is being successfully realised at this stage. The core staff of the unit have their desks in the unit area and generally have morning tea and lunch together. At least once a week all staff who teach in the unit have a formal meeting over lunch. Student activities on a unit basis have been initiated - a regular concert, excursions - and these have further served to bind the staff and the students into a group. In a short time much has been achieved in this area.

The focus of this activity is now moving to the curriculum aspects. This supports Hargreaves' analysis of the need to build up cooperative practices before moving to the more difficult question of how curriculum can be articulated across the cultures (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 225).

Despite the success of the cooperative aspects, progress in the curriculum has not been easy. The staff resolved to produce a chart each term to identify what they teach in the various areas of the curriculum and to provide a base from which curriculum links could be established. This was done in term 1 except that the year 6 staff found it difficult to complete the section of the chart called "English". In discussion with them it was found that they used "Language", not "English", and that their conceptualization used rather different words from those laid out in the chart. They felt that the structure wasn't theirs. For term 2 they compromised some of their feelings to the general purpose of getting something on the chart but the differences in the ways primary and secondary teachers describe what they do is evident. So when the staff came to lay out the curriculum structure of the unit in ways that made sense to each group of staff it was clear that it was still expressed very much in primary and secondary forms. This was confirmed when the staff developed a table laying out the curriculum structure of the Unit (now called Unit 3) - see table 4

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Table 4
CURRICULUM STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

YEAR	CURRICULUM STRUCTURE OF UNIT 3	LOTE
Year 6	Home room teacher takes all areas exc. PE, Art, Music; Lib. is shared	LOTE is taught across the unit with vertical groups
Year 7	One teacher for each of English, Maths, Science, Humanities, the Arts (Music, Woodwork, Art, Graphics, Media, Ceramics, Textiles, Performing Arts), Personal Development (P.E. including Swimming, Home Eco.), Information Technology.	
Year 8	One teacher for each of English, Maths, Science, Humanities, the Arts (Music, Woodwork, Art, Graphics, Media, Ceramics, Textiles, Performing Arts), Personal Development (P.E. including Swimming, Home Eco.), Information Technology.	
Summary - in year 6 students have one teacher for the bulk of the studies plus 3 specialists. In years 7 & 8 students have 7 subject areas with probably one teacher per area; in the Arts there are potentially 8 different teachers depending on selections and in Personal Development there are probably 2 teachers. It is estimated that each student has potentially 12 different teachers."		

(from a school document, June, 1993)

Into this context the developing debate about middle schools and schooling (NBEET Middle Years Project) has provided the school with more principles and practices to apply to their situation. They are now developing a number of significant principles about the basis and practice of the Unit:

1. The unit is not "transition" but stands in its own right in the continuity across the P-12 years. They have stopped using the word "transition" in naming the unit. Whether they eventually come to call themselves the Middle Unit remains to be seen. At the moment the unit is called Unit 3;
2. They are using the literature on middle schooling to develop principles which they could use to evaluate their present practice and underlie their future developments - see Table 5

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Table 5
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FROM THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERATURE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FROM MIDDLE SCHOOLING

1. Need for a new culture of schooling (2, p5) - avoid domination by primary and secondary cultures.
2. Teams should be small - no more than 200-300 students (1, p7)
3. Year levels involved is not clear - 1968-88 US figs shows largest rise in 6-8 org. (1, p8)
4. Staff teams should be 2-5 who teach the same students different subjects; often teachers have mastery in >1 subject and thus teach multiple content areas (1, p8, 16; 2, p20).
5. Curriculum allows students to experience integrated themes rather than separate subjects (1, p8; 2. p23)
6. Teachers have planning time together (1, P8)
7. Students should have contact with small number of adults and a significant relationship with one or two (1, p7; 2, p13-14, 20)
8. Even within units one cannot presume homogeneity- students are always developing from one point to another, Thus kids at the end of a unit are not going to be the same as those at the start of it. Whenever students are at the start or end problems will occur unless the curriculum is seen as a continuum with developments within the unit as well as within the unit.(1, p3).
9. Curriculum has continuity and coherence across 6-9 (2, p19, 25)
10. Use "mixed ability" settings (2, p20, 37)
11. Use assessment approaches which recognise achievement
12. Cooperate closely with parents on information, values, cultural expectations (2, p37)
13. Timetabling arrangements provide extended time for a core of teachers to work with a group of students (1, p16; 2 p37)
14. Staff work cooperatively to serve the needs of young adolescents the understanding of whom is them prime consideration of curriculum and teaching (2. p17, 26)
15. Maintaining high attendance strategies (2, p11)
16. Participation in studies that are seen as worth doing (2, p11)
17. Students are able to engage in exploration - choice, risk-taking (1, p15; 3, ch 5 & 7)
18. Students as young adolescents are very diverse (1, p12). This is more so at this stage than at earlier or later years. Don't expect the same from all; don't expect each to perform in same way consistently; don't judge on basis of limited evidence

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2. Eyers, V., *Report of the Junior Secondary Review - Summary*, Education Department of South Australia, 1992.
3. *In the Middle - Schooling for Young Adolescents* - Compulsory Years Project Project Paper No. 7 - Canberra, AGPS, 1993

(from a School Document - June 1993)

These developments provide the potential of leading to a useful debate about the curriculum meanings of these principles and a resolution that is valuable for the learning of the students. The trust and cooperation that has been developed between the staff should enable this debate to occur. But, in the end result, this resolution will depend on what happens before Year 6 and after

Year 8. A solution produced in isolation by this unit could just develop problems in transition from years 5-->6 and from years 8-->9. In other words the problem can only be finally be solved by the school taking a total P-12 view. The unit is now engaged in taking this up with the school while trying to press on with its curriculum activity.

In this context questions could be asked whether the notion of middle schools just establishes another structure for students to pass through, thus setting up another transition barrier for students to pass through in their experience of schooling. On the other hand the argument for a concept of middle schooling suggests strongly that the culture of primary schools with their emphasis on a "warmly nurturing, but closely controlling" practice and the secondary schools with their fragmentation "into separate subject departments, each with a different teacher" are not appropriate for the young adolescent (Eyers, 1992a, p. 9).

Eyers' analysis of the nature and needs of the young adolescent strongly claims the need for an appropriate schooling that is 'in the middle' of the P-12 experience, responding appropriately to the students aged from about 11-15 years. Such a structure could enable the P-12 experience to be smoother but only if the middle school experience is different from, but in a continuum with, the earlier and the later years. The concepts I tried to express in Table 1 of the continuums are congruent with this notion. The primary school culture has a tendency to be stuck at the start of each continuum, while the secondary school tends to emphasise the end. But between the beginning and the end is a developmental sequence and the middle schooling argument suggests a way of providing a pattern of schooling and curriculum to handle this.

The experience of this study and the growing awareness of the concepts of middle schooling are beginning to suggest that an effective provision of curriculum continuity requires a new look at the structures in which the curriculum is set. The development of understandings about the nature of the young adolescent within the P-12 experience is suggesting that a new culture of schooling is required for these students.

4. THE FUTURE IN SUPPORTING THE P-12 EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS

These discussions and conclusions confirm much of the previous argument identifying the importance of conceptualizing the needs of students as they move through the levels of schooling as much more than being given information. Schools need to focus on ways of linking the educational programs from which students are coming to the educational programs to which students are proceeding. Hargreaves (1992) argues that "effective continuity is secured more through human understanding, communication and agreement at an informal level and the necessary openness, trust and support that come with it....This interpersonal network is what holds the formal business together....Effective continuity ultimately depends on building a community of teachers whose experiences and commitments are not confined to a single grade, division or subject but to the school as a whole" (p. 225). I would have liked Hargreaves to include "a community of schools P-12".

If Hargreaves is right, that effective continuity requires an interpersonal network, then the sort of structure described in the Partnerships or the P-12 school would seem to be the way to go. While, then, the structural changes involved in P-12 schools are unlikely in the near future, we would seem to need to find ways of establishing interpersonal networks across schools as the Partnerships in small districts seem to be developing. Furthermore, the linking of these networks with the concepts of middle schooling seem to provide a more effective view of how curriculum and schooling structures should exist in between the beginning point of primary schooling and the end point of secondary schooling becasue it is linked closely to what appears to be a valuable view of the nature of students at this stage.

But as the case studies identify, actually developing links across schools is a very time-consuming and often very difficult operation, especially when more than one school community is involved. And yet it would seem that such links are necessary if our aim of enabling all children to learn successfully and coherently is to be met. Further monitoring of developments in the examples which exist is important so that ways of handling the problems can be identified and publicised. A starting point would seem to be that all teachers need to see themselves as part of a P-12 system with a clear view of where the students have come from and where they are going.

Given the problems of achieving this and the strains that our systems of schooling are suffering central control of curriculum and assessment in such a problematic context starts to look seductively attractive with its promise of clear sequences of learning. However, I would argue that prescribed detailed sequences deny much of the complexity that we know about how children learn (Stringer, 1992) and thus makes nonsense of the claims of providing excellence in education if the individual student is sacrificed on the altar of the so-called right sequence and right knowledge tested by standardised pencil and paper tests. The educational wisdom of the way such curriculum is designed and implemented will be a debate about schooling and a challenge for both developers and implementers that is clearly on the horizon if not in our backyards. Establishing priorities between the various forces will tax the ingenuity of those whose basic viewpoint is the benefit for each child's effective learning across the P-12 continuums.

Bill Stringer
June 1993.

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